

Botulism

Definition: Botulism is a serious, potentially fatal illness. It is caused by a nerve toxin produced by *Clostridium botulinum* bacteria.. Botulism is always considered a medical emergency. It can cause death by paralyzing the muscles used to breathe.

Transmission: People can get botulism in different ways:

- By eating food contaminated with the poison
- From the toxin produced when a wound is infected with the bacteria
- When a baby eats or drinks something that contains spores of the bacteria – the hard-shelled form that the bacteria take on when they aren't able to grow and reproduce
- When a person is accidentally given too much botulinum toxin that is being used for medical or cosmetic purposes
- Botulism cannot be passed from one person to another

Signs and symptoms: Symptoms of botulism are the same, regardless of how people get it. They include double vision, blurred vision, drooping eyelids, slurred speech, difficulty swallowing, dry mouth, and muscle weakness. Infants with botulism can appear drowsy, feed poorly, become constipated, and have a weak cry and poor muscle tone. These are all symptoms of the muscle paralysis caused by the toxin. Without treatment, people with botulism may go on to develop paralysis of the arms, legs, trunk, and the muscles used for breathing.

Diagnosis: Diagnosis is made by clinical symptoms and laboratory confirmation.

Role of the School Nurse:

Prevention- Food-related botulism can be prevented through careful food-handling practices – home-canned foods are a special source of concern. Wound botulism can be prevented by promptly seeking medical care for infected wounds and by not using injectable street drugs.

Treatment Recommendations- Intensive supportive care in a hospital is the primary treatment for all forms of botulism.

Exclusions – No exclusions apply to this condition as it is not passed from one person to another

Reporting Requirements- Suspect botulism should be reported immediately to 1-800-821-5821.

Resources:

- American Academy of Pediatrics. Botulism and Infant Botulism. In: Pickering LK, Baker CJ, Kimberlin DW, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2012 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 29th ed. Elk Grove Village, IL. American Academy of Pediatrics; 2012: 281-284.
- Heymann, David L., MD. *Control of Communicable Diseases Manual*. 19th ed. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association, 2008.
- CDC Website on Botulism: <http://www.cdc.gov/nczved/divisions/dfbmd/diseases/botulism/>
- Infant Botulism Treatment and Prevention Program, Division of Communicable Disease Control, California Department of Public Health website: <http://www.infantbotulism.org/>
- University of Maine Cooperative Extension County Offices website: <http://extension.umaine.edu/county-offices/>

